

Roche sworn in as 20th Air Force secretary

WASHINGTON (AFPN) — Dr. James Roche was sworn in as the 20th secretary of the Air Force June 1 during a ceremony at the Pentagon.

David O. Cooke, director of administration and management for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, administered the oath of office. Roche was nominated by the president on May 7 and confirmed by the Senate on May 24.

As secretary, Roche is responsible for the functioning and efficiency of the Air Force, the formulation of the service's policies and programs and the timely implementation of decisions and instructions of the president and the secretary of defense.

"I am honored to be confirmed as the secretary of the Air Force, and to join one of the most innovative, dedicated and

respected teams the world has known — the United States Air Force," Roche said. "I appreciate the confidence and trust the president, the secretary of defense and the Senate have in me to lead this proud aerospace team. I consider it an esteemed privilege to have this opportunity to serve with the Air Force's outstanding men and women.

"Over the past decade, our nation has demanded increasingly more effort and sacrifice from the Air Force team — our active duty airmen, civil servants, Guardsmen, Reservists and contractors — and that team has responded brilliantly," Roche said. "The American people have the highest confi-

dence in our military forces and are justifiably proud of the Air Force's numerous achievements and bright future.

"We must now respond to this century's new and emerging national security environment by fostering even more constructive relationships among the services to more fully integrate for joint and combined operations," he said.

Roche, a retired Navy captain and was a recipient of the Arleigh Burke Fleet Trophy for the Navy's most improved combat unit in the Pacific in 1974.

"(I look) forward to piloting the journey ahead for the Air Force," he said.

"My vision is an aerospace future just as remarkable as its admired past. My pledge is that I will serve the way Air Force men and women do every day throughout the world, with integrity, selflessness and in earnest pursuit of excellence."

"We welcome Secretary Roche and his family to the Air Force team," said Gen. Michael E. Ryan, Air Force chief of staff.

"The secretary has had a distinguished and successful military and civilian career," Ryan said. "He brings a unique and valuable combination of military experience, executive management expertise and proven leadership that will be an asset to our Air Force and our nation. I look forward to serving with him."



Dr. James Roche,
Secretary of the
Air Force

1,500 Air Force people owe Social Security

WASHINGTON (AFPN) — About 1,500 Air Force people have been overpaid because of under collection of Social Security withholding of FICA and Medicare.

This problem affects people who had adjustments to base pay, such as promotions, demotions, longevity increases, forfeitures and the Montgomery G.I. Bill.

The problem was created with last year's tax release to the Defense Joint Military Pay System and has recently been fixed, Defense Finance Accounting Service officials said. Amounts of overpayments ranged from pennies to \$1,700.

The overpayments, which affect all services, may not be waived and must be paid back. DFAS will reduce the end-of-month May pay of about 700 people who owe \$120 or less.

The remaining, about 800 people, will have the shortfall prorated and deducted from their end-of-month pay for June, July and August. DFAS officials realize this may create a financial hardship for some people and will work those repayments on a case-by-case basis.

A small percentage of people had more money withheld than required. This money will be added back in their end-of-month May pay.

In addition to the problem with 2001 taxes, about 140 people had incorrect FICA taxes for 2000. Officials say these amounts were much smaller, but still must be corrected. These overpayments will be corrected once DFAS processes and corrects 2001 taxes.

For more information, call the finance office at 782-5574..

DOD seeks to set standards for blood collection as Red Cross prepares new rules

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON (AFPN) — The Department of Defense is working behind the scenes to create a national standard for collecting blood as the American Red Cross prepares to adopt new donor rules in September.

Red Cross officials said the rules stem from concerns about the spread of "mad cow" disease in Europe. The Red Cross plans not to take donations from persons who, at any time since 1980, spend or have spent a cumulative three months or more in the United Kingdom, or a cumulative six months or more in any one or more European countries, or received a blood transfusion in the United Kingdom.

DOD and the Red Cross currently follow the Food and Drug Administration's lead, said Army Col. Mike Fitzpatrick, director of the Armed Services Blood Program. He said the policy for the past two years has been to defer persons indefinitely as donors if they resided in the United Kingdom between 1980 and 1996 for a cumulative six months or more.

The current deferral rule affects 5 percent or less of DOD's donor population worldwide, he estimated.

Implementing the Red Cross' new policy throughout Europe would make about 25 percent of the active-duty force ineligible to donate blood, he said.

DOD will continue to follow the FDA, he said, but the FDA has not agreed to the Red Cross' policy — and two donor standards will be in use unless it does. DOD does not want that.

DOD officials said the better solution is a national standard for blood donors.

Officials at DOD, FDA, Human and Health Services and the Red Cross are working to establish a mutually agreed upon standard.

"We've prepared draft guidance and are waiting (for) the final determination. We need to know that before we could do anything," Fitzpatrick said. "Because of the way the FDA regulates us, it's going to require time to train people, put together standard operating procedures and a recruitment campaign to get donors. That's why it's taking the Red Cross until September. We'll have to do the same things, but we can't train

anyone until we know what we're training them for."

DOD meets its needs using today's donor standards, Fitzpatrick said. Even using the Red Cross' more restrictive policy, "We still think we could collect the blood we need within DOD by increasing recruitment efforts, command sponsorship and command emphasis on the need to donate blood," he said.

DOD collects about 100,000 units of blood per year. It must maintain that rate to have enough blood for troops in Kosovo, Bosnia and other areas where safe supplies would be hard to find and tap, Fitzpatrick said.

Everyone wants to be as cautious as possible, he said.

"With all the testing and screening we're doing to blood donors, the blood supply is the safest it has ever been," he said.

"So, it's safe to give and receive blood."

But there are questions about what's reasonable and necessary.

The incurable, always-fatal "mad cow" disease is caused by an infectious protein that destroys the victim's nervous system. Brain tissues literally turn spongy and shut down. Called variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans, the disorder usually kills within 18 months of the onset of symptoms.

There is no evidence the disease is or even can be transmitted

through a blood transfusion, Fitzpatrick said. To date, fewer than 100 cases of variant CJD have been reported since it was identified, and none was the result of a blood transfusion.

The only way the evidence today points to humans contracting variant CJD is by being unusually susceptible to it and eating infected meat. The infectious protein that triggers variant CJD, however, is known to be able to hide for 15 years or more in lymphatic tissue, the appendix, stomach, spleen, white cells, and in the blood at low levels, he said.

At this time, no blood test exists to detect the presence of the infectious protein, Fitzpatrick said.

The DOD veterinarians responsible for the wholesomeness of foods in military systems determined servicemembers and their families face little risk of contracting variant CJD, he said.

Deployed servicemembers are at less risk than casual travelers in Europe because military people often eat either Meals, Ready to Eat or food from military supply channels, which do not buy meat from the United Kingdom, Fitzpatrick said.

You are not eligible to donate blood right away if you:

- Weigh less than 110 pounds
- Have been out of the country within the last year
- Are pregnant
- Have had a blood transfusion
- Have been diagnosed with cancer

For more information visit the Red Cross website at www.redcross.org